

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to seating units that include flowable body cushions, and more particularly, to 10 seating units that comprise housing apparatuses that are designed to receive flowable body cushions.

Background

For many consumers, so-called "bean bag" seating 15 devices represent an attractive alternative to conventional furniture. Such devices are generally known to include a sack-like cover loosely filled with a solid filler material. Because the contour of such devices can be manipulated by the user and is adjusted by the user's body 20 weight, bean bags are generally considered to be extremely comfortable and versatile seating devices.

There are, however, potential drawbacks to bean bag seating devices. For example, these seating devices are typically used when placed directly onto the floor, where

they are easily soiled and stained. They may be considered aesthetically unpleasing because of placement directly on the floor. Also because of floor placement, it can be difficult to remove oneself from a bean bag chair. There 5 is thus a need for a seating device design that avoids the potential drawbacks of conventional devices that employ flowable body cushions such as bean bags.

Summary of the Invention

10 In one aspect, the present invention relates to a housing apparatus for placement on a floor and receiving a flowable body cushion. In one embodiment, the housing apparatus comprises a base portion and a back portion. The base portion has opposing first and second surfaces, the first surface facing in a direction towards the floor and the second surface facing in a direction away from the floor and having a maximum distance from the floor. The back portion extends from the base portion in a direction away from the floor and has a maximum distance from the 15 floor greater than the maximum distance from the floor of the base portion. Together, the base portion and the back portion define an area designed to receive the flowable body cushion. 20

In another embodiment, the housing apparatus of the invention includes a rigid cylinder having a bottom portion, a top portion, and a cylindrical wall surface extending between said bottom and top portions and defining 5 an open center portion. The center portion is designed to receive the flowable body cushion. In a particular embodiment, a circular base member is located within the open center portion to define an area designed to receive the flowable body cushion.

10 In another aspect, the present invention relates to seating devices that employ the housing apparatus of the present invention used in conjunction with a flowable body cushion, such as a bean bag.

In yet another aspect, the present invention relates 15 to a method of manufacturing a housing apparatus to be used in conjunction with a flowable body cushion. In one embodiment, the method includes the steps of forming the housing apparatus from a rigid cylinder having an open center portion designed to receive a flowable body cushion.

20 One advantage of the present invention is that it provides a housing apparatus for flowable body cushions so that, in certain embodiments, such cushions are not placed directly on the floor.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it provides an aesthetically pleasing seating device that includes a flowable body cushion.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it 5 provides a seating device that includes a flowable body cushion and provides for ease of use with respect to user entry and exit.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it provides a versatile seating device in that it provides a 10 housing into which different flowable body cushions may be placed.

Yet another advantage of the present invention is that it provides a simple, cost-effective process for manufacturing a seating device that is designed for use 15 with a flowable body cushion.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

Figs. 1a and 1b are perspective views of a first embodiment of the present invention.

20 Fig. 1c is a side view of a first embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 1d is a top view of a first embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 1e is a bottom view of a first embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 2a-2c are perspective views of a second embodiment of the present invention.

5 Fig. 2d is a close up view of a portion of a second embodiment of the present invention.

#### Preferred Embodiments

The present invention provides seating devices that 10 employ flowable body cushions. As used in the instant specification, "flowable body cushion" is intended to mean any cushion that includes a cover loosely filled with a solid filler material. Perhaps the most common example of a flowable body cushion as defined herein is a bean bag 15 chair. The contour of such cushions is modified by a user's body weight such that these cushions at least partially conform to a user's form. Although the flowable body cushion described with reference to the present invention is depicted as a cushion to be used as a chair, 20 the body cushion of the present invention is not intended to be limited to any particular size or application.

Various views of a preferred embodiment of the present invention are shown in Figs. 1a-1e. Housing apparatus 100 is essentially a cradle designed for

placement on a floor 150. Housing apparatus includes a base portion 110 and a back portion 120. The base portion 110 includes a first surface 111 that faces in a direction towards the floor 150, and a second surface 112 that faces 5 in a direction away from the floor 150. First and second surfaces 111 and 112 are preferably generally planar surfaces. Alternatively, the second surface 112 is generally concave such that a center portion of the second surface 112 is closer to the floor 150 than an off-center portion. The back portion 120 extends from the base 10 portion 110 in a direction away from the floor 150. As can be seen from Fig. 1, the back portion 120 has a maximum distance away from the floor that is greater than that of the second surface 112 of the base portion 110. The 15 housing apparatus 100 is made from suitable construction materials such as wood, stainless steel, poly vinyl chloride, high density poly ethylene, or other suitable natural or polymeric material. Preferably, the housing 100 is made from a polymer material such as poly vinyl chloride, upholstered with a suitable material such as woven fabric, foam, synthetic material, or preferably 20 leather.

Together, the base and back portions 110 and 120 of housing apparatus 100 define an area 130 designed to

receive a flowable body cushion 200, as shown in Fig. 1b. The cover of cushion 200 is made from any suitable material such as leather, suede, woven fabric, vinyl, or other suitable natural or synthetic material. Cushion 200 is 5 loosely filled with small pieces such as beads, particles, pellets, strips, or regularly or irregularly shaped pieces of any suitable material including synthetic materials such as polyurethane, polystyrene, and foams such as Styrofoam® (Dow Chemical Co., Delaware); or natural materials such as 10 beans and rice. It is intended that the size and shape of the area 130 be appropriate to work well in conjunction with commercially available flowable body cushions such as bean bag chairs. As such, it can be seen that the present invention provides for a versatile seating device because 15 the user may choose to vary the cushion 200.

Cushion 200 is optionally removeably attached to the housing apparatus 100 by any suitable means, such as by Velcro® (Velcro Industries, Netherlands) or by zippers, snaps, or buttons. Such attachment means, however, are not 20 necessary for the proper operation of the present invention.

Housing apparatus optionally includes one or more feet members 140 extending between the first surface 111 of the base portion 110 and the floor 150. Feet members 140 are

attached to the base portion 110 by any suitable means, such as by nail, screw, or adhesive. In one embodiment, only one large foot member 140 is attached to the base portion 110, while in other embodiments a plurality of feet 5 members 140 is used. The feet members 140 are arranged between the base portion 110 and the floor 150 in any suitable configuration.

As shown in Figs. 1a-1e, embodiment 100 is circular. In this embodiment, the back portion 120 conforms to an 10 outer arcuate portion of the base portion 110. It is preferred that the back portion 120, as defined as the portion of the housing apparatus 100 having a distance from the floor 150 greater than the maximum distance from the floor of the base portion 110, extend at least 180 degrees 15 around the circular shape of the base portion 110. It is also preferred that the back portion 120 taper from its maximum distance from the floor 150 to the maximum distance from the floor of the base portion 110, as shown in Figs. 1a and 1c. Such preferred embodiment is thought to be 20 optimal for user comfort and for the most suitable area 130 to receive flowable body cushion 200.

It is to be appreciated by those of skill in the art that although the preferred embodiment shown in Figs. 1a-1e is preferably circular in design, other suitable shapes

such as rectangular, ovular, and other regular and irregular shapes are intended to be captured in the present invention.

The base and back portions 110 and 120 of the present invention may be separate elements attached to each other by any suitable technique. Alternatively, the base and back portions are made from a single integral element to permit a simple and cost-effective manufacturing process. In this case, the present invention is made from a rigid cylindrical structure. As shown in Figs. 2a-2c, the housing apparatus 100 of the present invention comprises a rigid cylinder having a bottom portion 310, a top portion 320, and a cylindrical wall surface 325 extending between the bottom and top portions 310 and 320. Wall surface 325 defines an open center portion 330 designed to receive a flowable body cushion 200. As shown in Figs. 2a and 2b, the bottom portion 310 is preferably parallel to the floor 111 while the top portion 320 may be either parallel or non-parallel to the floor 111. It is preferred that the top portion 320 be non-parallel to the floor as shown in Fig. 2b to facilitate ease of use such that a user may easily get into and out from a flowable body cushion placed within housing apparatus 100.

It is preferred that a base member 311 be included in the embodiment shown in Figs. 2a-2c. Base member 311 abuts, and generally spans across, the bottom portion 310. The addition of the optional base member 311 avoids contact 5 between the flowable body cushion 200 and the floor 150, thus helping to keep cushion 200 clean. The base member 311 may simply be a single or plurality of rigid or semi-rigid structural support members 311a, 311b fixed to the cylindrical wall surface 325 using fixing means 370 such as 10 screws, as shown in Fig. 2d. Preferably, the base member 311 comprises two pieces of circular plywood, each having a thickness of about 0.75 inches. In another embodiment, the base member 311 comprises a single piece of plywood having a circumferential channel into which the edge of the bottom 15 portion 320 sits. When base member 311 is used, optional feet members 340 may also be used in the embodiment by attachment to the base portion 311, as shown in Fig. 2c.

The present invention provides aesthetically pleasing and functionally useful seating devices that employ 20 flowable body cushions. When used in accordance with the present invention, the seating devices provide cost-effective housing apparatuses for flowable body cushions that avoid the potential drawbacks of the prior art.

It will be obvious to those skilled in the art, having regard to this disclosure, that other variations on this invention beyond those specifically exemplified here may be made. Such variations are, however, to be considered as 5 coming within the scope of this invention as limited solely by the following claims.